Two Fatal Bits of Teutonic Stupidity Cost Germany the War

FIELD MARSHAL VON MACKENSEN

© by UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

von Hindenburg
Generalfeldmarschall
G. H. Qu. 5. 12. 1916.

(FACSIMILE of HINDENBURG'S SIGNATURE)

HINDENBURG *in* FULL REGALIA .

GENERAL VON LUDENDORFF

Reporter's Analysis of Hun Leaders' Characters Reveals Cunning and Stupidity, Brutality and Suavity, Strength and Weakness, Curiously Mixed, With Fatal Results

Hindenburg and Ludendorff Had No Idea America Could Do Anything, as Interview in 1916 Shows, and They Knew Nothing of Seething Russia

By KARL H. WIEGAND.

"WHAT the Allies did not accomplish in 1915 they could not accomplish in 1916; the goal now set for 1917, namely the defeat of Germany, will not be attained by them in that year, nor in 1918. Let them come on. They have lost approximately 15,000,000 men in dead, wounded, sick and prisoners. If they could not win with them they cannot win without them."

There was no tone of boasting in the voice of Field Marshal Paul von Beneckendorff und Hindenburg. But there was defiance. The Wotan of the German war gods spoke with quiet finality as if he believed what he said.

"But if America should come in?" I asked.

"That would not change the situation," interposed Ludendorff, sitting on my right. He thinks and speaks much quicker than the old Field Marshal.

"America is already doing us all the harm she can," added Hindenburg.

"Permit me, Herr General Feldmarschal, don't you underrate America's vast resources, human and material, and perhaps also the spirit that might be aroused in her people?" I asked. "Judgment and reason would seem to counsel caution against embarking on any course that would draw the United States into the conflict. It is not unreasonable to assume that she might turn the scales against you." I added.

The grim old war god, the idol of the German people, gazed long and deep into the dinner plate in front of him as if he would read the future in the porcelain.

"Not resources as such, but resources through resourcefulness transformed into active fighting power combined with the highest efficiency, that power permeated with the indomitable spirit of a united people imbued with the will to victory of a nation fighting in a righteous cause, the whole centralized and directed with intelligence—that is what makes for victory in war."

Predictions for 1916.

It was a long sentence for the terse, laconic old Field Marshal. Whatever his faults and weaknesses, volubility was not one of them. Slowly, deliberately, punctuated with pauses, he spoke in his jerky but forceful manner.

Again Ludendorff broke in with something to add: "Before your country reaches that stage—a very long process—and makes it felt on this side it will all be over," he said.

The place, grand general headquarters of the German armies—in the village of Pless on the vast estate of the Prince of Pless in Silesia near the Russian border. The scene, the dining room in the living quarters of the Kaiser's military adviser and Chief of the General Staff—a large farmhouse. The time, the evening of December 5, 1916. Present, Field Marshal von Hindenburg; his chief of strategy, Gen. Erich Ludendorff; several members of their staff and an American correspondent.

Conversation around the long dining table lulled. Every member of the staff present wanted to lose not a word of the discussion between the two greatest of the German military chieftains and the war correspondent. All eyes were on Hindenburg. Outside the cold December wind moaned dismally through the leafless trees. There was an atmosphere of gravity, as if vital decisions were pending, which even the momentary expectation of news of the fall of Bucharest could not dispel. Only later did I learn that already then the question of a renewal of the ruthless submarine campaign was in the balance.

We had been discussing what in effect were the possibilities of the approach of the dusk of the German war gods and the shattering of their Walhalla of militarism, in the very heart of which we sat that evening. Only we clothed our thoughts in more polite terms with due deference to them as my hosts and to me as their guest.

Earlier in the evening I had a chat with Hindenburg in his workroom in the division of operations of the General Staff, located in what had been the administration building of the big estate. There also he inscribed his name and the date of my visit in my autograph album. He invited me to dine with him and Ludendorff at his living quarters in the house of the superintendent of the estate.

The Kaiser lived in the unpretentious schloss or palais of the Prince of Pless with the owner as his guest. It was an ugly pile of red brick. General headquarters was 150 miles from the nearest point on the eastern firing line and about 300 from the western front. It was free from that abomination of all abominations—aerial attacks. Nothing will so quickly transform the saintliest Christian into a cursing heathen with a flow of profanity that would make a mule driver green with envy as persistent attacks by the "cavalry of the air" upon tired and worn out soldiers and officers.

Hindenburg Misjudged America.

Ludendorff had started the discussion that evening by asking whether there was any likelihood of the United States joining the Allies against Germany. Copying his own tactics, I had answered with a question: Did Germany intend to renew the ruthless submarine war, condemned by all the world? Ludendorff looked past me to Hindenburg on my left with that deference to his chief which he always showed in the presence of the old Field Marshal.

One could never tell what might develop in war; war was full of surprises, remarked Hindenburg cautiously. There was no desire, no present intentions, to renew the unrestricted U-boat war. "Unless we are forced to do it," here quickly interposed Ludendorff. I did not know what the situation was in America except for what I had read, but I supposed Ludendorff's expression covered it—"unless we are forced in."

Hindenburg said he did not wish to say anything that might offend my feelings, "but America to all intents and purposes is already the enemy of Germany." His resentment of what he called "America's unjust attitude" cropped out several times, but he was not as brutally frank as Field Marshal August von Mackensen, who in the taking of Przemysl in Galicia on June 4, 1915, ordered me to be out of the jurisdiction of his army by 4 in the afternoon because "as a matter of principle I want no Americans around me." Mackensen was the original anti-American high commander in the German army and an autocrat of autocrats.

"No one questions America's vast resources in men, money and material, but to weld them into a fighting machine takes time—years," remarked Ludendorff. "See how long Germany has been at it."

That was the total error of the German war gods. It showed that they did not have the attribute of military omniscience so often credited to them.

Turning to Hindenburg I asked him what he knew of revolutionary activity in Russia.

"I am tired of hearing of revolution in Russia," he answered brusquely. "I don't believe in it. Since the first day of the war I have heard nothing but 'revolution in Russia,' and there has been none.

Wrong About Russia Also.

"I don't believe there will be any until the war is over. Russia is so vast and so loosely organized in the way of communication and transportation—it has no real nervous system, so to speak—that it reminds me of a big jellyfish. You can stick a knife in one part and the rest of it does not even know it.

"My plans are not based upon the possibilities of revolution in Russia. It forms no part of them. I have been fed up on that for two years. If revolution comes, so much the better for us; if it doesn't, I will not be disappointed."

Fatal error number two by Germany's Wotan. The Russian revolution came in March, three months later. In April after Congress declared war Lieut.-Col. von Haften, Ludendorff's right hand man, bewailed to me "the fatal error that we did not know a revolution was coming in Russia." He said, "Had we known that we would not have renewed the ruthless submarine war on February 1, and thus would have averted war with America. A fatal error! A fatal error!" And so it proved.

Notwithstanding the very general belief that the Russian revolution was "made in Germany," I do not think Hindenburg was bluffing when he said on the evening of December 5, 1916, that he did not believe in the talk of a revolution in Russia. Only a month before, on November 6, to be exact, King Ferdinand in Sofia complained bitterly and with signs of much nervousness and impatience that the Central Governments were getting no reliable information from Russia.

"What's going on in Russia?" he asked. "Berlin knows nothing, Vienna can give us no information that can at all be relied upon, and we learn nothing that we ought to know about what is taking place there. It makes me nervous."

It was the last time that Hindenburg and Ludendorff talked with an American until the defeated and crushed old Field Marshal received a delegation of correspondents, including some Americans, in his headquarters at Cassel a few weeks ago, and pleaded for an amelioration of armistice conditions. Ludendorff, who wanted to become the new Iron Chancellor of Germany, was not there. He was gone. He got from under—some say he fled. His whereabouts is unknown.

Hindenburg remained to take his medicine along with his people. That alone should prove which of the two leading German military figures was truly the greater. It recalls what an officer of his staff remarked to me in December, 1914, after the severe Austrian defeat by the Russians at Ivangorod, forcing Hindenburg to fall back for more than fifty miles.

"Hindenburg was never greater in victory than in defeat," said he.

The Idol of Germany.

Much has been written about those two figures in Germany's stand against the greater part of the world, and not a little by writers who never saw or talked with them. Much more will be written about those two personalities and their actions by historians of the future. I have given some of the conversation of that evening as affording a psychological glimpse into the make-up of the two men who were conceiving the plans and directing the military operations not only of Germany but in a general way of her allies, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey as well. They did not know of the spirit that can be aroused in the American people nor did they believe in what was to them "the impossible," the speed with which the American people could convert raw resources into the finished product, into a colossal fighting machine. They did not know that a revolution was coming in Russia, first to help them, later to engulf them.

When I asked Hindenburg what would happen if the bond of a "united people" and the "will to victory of an entire nation," which he had declared essential to success, should no longer exist, he answered with an expressive movement of the hand which I interpreted as meaning "the game will be up."

"Das kommt nicht bei uns" (that will not take place with us), he said. But he was mistaken.

So much has been written about Hindenburg and Ludendorff that I will give my personal impressions of them. In August, 1916, Germany, with the "glooms" resting heavily upon the people, was suddenly electrified by the news that the popular idol, Hindenburg, had been placed at the head of all the German armies to succeed Falkenhayn. Until then Hindenburg had been only commander in chief in the East.

The spirits of army and people rose. I was the first foreigner in Berlin to hear it. Maximilian Harden having called me up on the telephone and told me some hours before it became public. Officers in the Adlon Hotel, when I told them, threw their arms around one another for joy.

Gen. Erich von Falkenhayn, who had been Minister of War and had been named by the Kaiser to succeed Count Helmuth von Moltke as Chief of the General Staff some time after the German defeat at the first battle of the Marne, had proved no greater success. Hindenburg and Ludendorff had travelled a road of triumphal victories that led into the heart of the people. Falkenhayn achieved nothing spectacular. The masses did not take into consideration that the French, the British and the Belgians were not the Russians.

Falkenhayn's fall, despite the Kaiser's favor, became only a question of time after the rivers of blood in his ill fated Verdun venture, so often attributed to the Crown Prince.

The Kaiser did not particularly want Hindenburg as chief of his armies, a post which carries with it the position of chief military adviser to the monarch. The grim, blunt old Field Marshal had never been a personal favorite of his. Had he not retired some time before the outbreak of war, report said, because he had told the Kaiser some plain truths? The Kaiser was willing to heap honors on him, but preferred that for personal contact Hindenburg remain in the East.

His cold reserve, rough granitelike appearance and short, brusque manners, so sharply in contrast with the polish, suavity and almost Frenchlike courtliness of manner and magnetic personality of Falkenhayn, never appealed very strongly to the "Oberste Kriegsherr." Then, too, Hindenburg was independence personified.

There was nothing of the courtier about the warrior of the Masurian swamps. He was not given to flattery, but was given considerably to criticism. When he became gruff and spoke his mind freely his words had the iciness of liquefied air. Much of the time he was taciturn, something Wilhelm II. never could stand. The Kaiser was very impressionable and anything around him that savored of gloom depressed his spirits. To offset that, however, Hindenburg had a rocklike confidence upon every occasion; though taciturn he was never dispirited and it was believed that he would be able to steady the Kaiser.

But the Kaiser resisted for a long time the pressure to name the hero of the East. Less than a year before had Hindenburg not slowly and with aggravating deliberation unbuckled his sword and quietly laid it on the table before his highest war lord with, "Then, your Majesty, I am no longer in command here," when the Kaiser had impetuously insisted upon some changes in the Field Marshal's campaign plans in the East? A member of Hindenburg's staff related the incident to me.

The Kaiser would much have preferred the more courtierlike and bendable Mackensen for Chief of Staff, but next to Falkenhayn Mackensen was the most unpopular high commander with army and people. And as there were many reports of friction between Falkenhayn and Hindenburg it was known as well that Hindenburg had no particular love for Mackensen, whose victories were largely credited to the military genius of his chief of staff, Major-Gen. von Seeckt, often called the "second Ludendorff."

Mackensen was a great favorite of the Kaiser, but intensely disliked by the Crown Prince because he had so often tattled to the father about the son when young Wilhelm was under Mackensen in Danzig. I had been with Mackensen in 1914 near Lodz when he commanded Hindenburg's Ninth Army. His Quartermaster-General at the time was Colonel, later Major-General Sauberzweig, who executed Edith Cavell.

The Hindenburg cult reached the height, always dangerous to a hero or popular idol, where it became increasingly difficult to live up to it, and it was certain to wane the moment he no longer could make the people happy with victories.

Ludendorff was a close second in popular favor. He was, so to speak, the new Siegfried, the mythical hero of Germany, come to life again. He also was looked upon somewhat as a reincarnation of the Moltke of 1870 in military strategy. There was much dispute as to which of the two was really "the great one." In the army, as among the people, there were two opinions, but neither ever felt quite certain. One could never come from general headquarters without the question being asked, "Do tell us, which is the real genius?"

The two men were very different from each other. Hindenburg was cold, distant, severe, but had the reputation of being just, and was believed to be well nigh infallible in military judgment. His appearance was rough, his face looked as if it had been cut out of an oak tree with a dull axe.

He had the typical square head which could easily be drawn with four lines. He had small pig eyes deeply set. The dominant note in his face was grim, ironlike will and determination to the point of brutality, especially when in repose, but that expression was greatly modified when he spoke. In manner he was short, brusque, but seldom unkind; in speech, terse and laconic. He was at that time regarded not only as a great military leader but also a sort of patriarchal father of his people.

Ludendorff is more than fifteen years younger than Hindenburg. The former has a finer head and a more intellectual face. He has rather large bulbous eyes in contrast to Hindenburg's deep set small eyes. Ruthless forcefulness, the forcefulness of the mastiff rather than the tenacity of the bulldog, is the dominant note in his face.

Terse and laconic as Hindenburg was, Ludendorff was even more silent. Hindenburg would upon occasion talk; Ludendorff seldom. At that, he had qualities which rendered him more companionable and likable. He could be very sympathetic and was warmly temperamental, had a keener and quicker mind, was excitable and at times "blew up" when things went wrong. He was a thinker, schemer and planner.

His face, much more sensitive than that of Hindenburg's, often reflected his thought, while that of the old Field Marshal was always sphinxlike. Capt. Caemmerer, now dead, then personal adjutant to Hindenburg, once summed up for me the two currents of opinion running in headquarters regarding the two men.

"We worship Hindenburg, but we love Ludendorff," he said.

The Two Leaders Compared.

In action Hindenburg was conservative, cautious, deliberate and slow. He weighed things carefully. Ludendorff was aggressive, forceful, impetuous, eager and impatient. One had the impression, and that impression was often strengthened by men at headquarters, that of the two he was the thinker, originator and conceiver of plans.

Hindenburg tested, weighed, examined, passed upon and approved or disapproved them. Ludendorff was the dynamic power, the driving force and the inspiration; Hindenburg was the balance, the control, the brake when necessary, and the hand on the throttle. Every morning about 7:30 Ludendorff came to Hindenburg with the night's reports, his suggestions and new plans. The Field Marshal passed upon them, approved, modified or added his own ideas.

There was a strong streak of Teutonic fatalism in Hindenburg. What God decreed would be and was good. Ludendorff tried to leave nothing to chance. The Field Marshal had a soldier's contempt for politics. "What more can they give me?" he once said to me. When I suggested the Chancellorship, he answered brusquely, "I would not thank them for that."

He declared he had no further ambitions. Ludendorff, on the other hand, was inordinately ambitious. He had a fondness for and studied politics assiduously. Often he used Hindenburg's name for political purpose and effect. Not really understanding politics or the part that psychology plays in it, he used Hindenburg's name more and more until it lost its potency with the people. Some asserted that Ludendorff had done that deliberately to diminish or destroy the Hindenburg spell with the people.

Ludendorff had ambitions, great ambitions. His friends said he was the logical man to become Chancellor, to direct both the military and political destinies of Germany, that he would be a new Iron Chancellor, a combination of a Bismarck and a Moltke. Ludendorff, it appeared, had some such thought.

More and more insidiously crept the thought through the German army and among the people that not Hindenburg but Ludendorff was "the great one" of those strange military twins. Openly it was stated that "Ludendorff made Hindenburg." Steadily Ludendorff's influence with the Kaiser increased as that of Hindenburg, who would not meddle in politics more than he was forced to, waned.

Ludendorff Practically Dictator.

By the fall of 1916 Ludendorff was practically dictator. He was dominating not only the military but also the political situation. The Kaiser leaned more and more on him. There is little doubt that he persuaded the Kaiser to make the spring offensive of 1918 and that that was a Ludendorff and not a Hindenburg offensive. The *Taegliche Rundschau*, one of the military organs of Berlin, stated specifically that the responsibility for Germany's appeal to President Wilson for an armistice rested solely upon Ludendorff, upon whose personal initiative it was made. The game being up, he then resigned and disappeared.

Hindenburg comes of a family of the old but lesser Prussian nobility. He was retired from the army in 1911 and will be 72 in October. He was wounded in the war with Austria in 1866 and fought as lieutenant in the war with France in 1870. His brother is a writer.

Ludendorff, although a commoner—he has declined patents of nobility—is a descendant of King Erik XIV. of Sweden, and to Sweden he is reported to have fled. He was born in Kruszevnia in the province of Posen. His father was a Landwirt or farmer on a large scale. One brother left Germany and settled in the East Indies. Another took to astronomy and became the chief astronomer in the Astro-Physical Observatory in Potsdam.

Ludendorff's grandfather was a prominent merchant in Stettin and married Ada Lovisa Leffler, a Swedish girl. The latter was a direct descendant of Virginia Eriksdotter, a daughter of King Erik XIV. of Sweden by Agda Pehrsdotters, the daughter of a rich Finnish merchant with whom he contracted a "lefthanded union." King Erik was poisoned in 1577 at the instigation of his brother.

In 1909 Ludendorff married Frau Margarethe Pernet, a widow with four children, who was the daughter of a manufacturer. There were many legends about Ludendorff's appointment as chief of staff to Hindenburg in August, 1914. There was nothing mysterious about it. But the popular mind in Germany, as elsewhere, clings to romance.

Hindenburg's Appointment.

In 1913 Ludendorff commanded an infantry regiment in Dusseldorf. On April 22, 1914, he was made Major-General and placed in command of an infantry brigade in Strassburg. When the war broke out Ludendorff was assigned to Gen. von Emmich as Chief Quartermaster of the latter's forces, the first to attack Liege. In the storm on Fort Fleron on August 6 Prince Wilhelm of Lippe, Gen. von Buelow and Gen. von Wussow, the last commanding the Fourteenth Infantry Brigade, were killed by the fire of the brave Belgians.

Von Wussow's brigade, through the loss of its commander, hesitated and began to waver. Seeing that, Ludendorff immediately took command of the brigade and personally led it in a charge on the Belgian line north of Fort Fleron. Ludendorff's attack was successful, and the Germans broke through. After the capture of Liege, credit for which was given to Emmich, the Kaiser summoned Ludendorff to make a personal report to him. He was so pleased that he threw his arms around Ludendorff and conferred upon him the Pour le Merite cross.

By the middle of August Gen. von Prittwitz, one of the Kaiser's favorites, was badly defeated by Gen. Rennenkampf and his Russians in East Prussia. The General Staff decided that the Kaiser's favorite must be cashiered. Impressed by the decision, initiative and energy displayed by Ludendorff in the attack on Liege, Gen. von Moltke, Chief of the General Staff, recommended to the Kaiser the appointment of Ludendorff as Chief of Staff in the East and Hindenburg, the old warrior of the Masurian swamps, as commander in chief in place of Prittwitz. The latter was reported to have committed suicide because of the disgrace of his removal, but he is or was still living quietly in Berlin when I left there.

At 3 o'clock on the afternoon of August 22 Hindenburg received a telegram on his estate near Hanover, saying that he had been selected for an important command and to hold himself in readiness to leave the following day. The telegram did not state what the command was. Half an hour later a second telegram arrived stating that Major-Gen. Ludendorff had been named as his chief of staff and would arrive between 3 and 4 o'clock that night on a special train from Namur. Hindenburg was to be at the station ready to board the train.

At 7:30 finally came a telegram telling Hindenburg where he was destined to go and that he had been appointed to the command of the army in East Prussia, where Mackensen and Francois were making a desperate stand against Rennenkampf and Samsonoff. The track was cleared for the Hindenburg-Ludendorff special from Hanover to Marienburg in East Prussia.

During the rest of the night and the next day Hindenburg and Ludendorff worked out their plans, which resulted in the defeat of the Russians in the Masurian Lake battles of Tannenberg, Neidenburg and Ortelsburg. Samsonoff committed suicide. Friction between him and Rennenkampf is supposed to have contributed largely to their disaster. Hindenburg himself remarked to me once, "Had Rennenkampf and Samsonoff cooperated, or the one known what was happening to the other, they could have crushed me."

When I asked Hindenburg about the reports that thousands of Russian soldiers had drowned in the lakes, a very popular story in Germany, the old Field Marshal replied, "Nonsense! Just a legend which the people will insist on having. I doubt whether you will find 150 dead Russians in the lakes."

Hindenburg, who bade defiance to the Allies and who said "the war will go to the side that has the strongest nerves," now knows which side that was. Whatever place future historians will give him, it will be said that he was not great enough for his mental horizon to extend beyond the borders of Europe. But it will be credited to him that he took his medicine with his people. The same cannot be said of Ludendorff, who followed the example of the Kaiser and the Crown Prince.

President Poincare's Visit

Continued from Preceding Page.

that Queen Eleanore was induced to abandon her trip.

It is betraying no secret of the State Department to mention that in 1902, after Prince Henry of Prussia's trip to New York, Chicago, Washington, &c., it issued a circular instructing its diplomatic representatives abroad to do all in their power to discourage trips to the United States by members of reigning houses, on the ground of the difficulty experienced in securing from Congress the funds for their entertainment and in providing for their safety. In fact, when money was asked from Congress for the payment of the expenses of the visit of the ex-Kaiser's brother to America. Representatives anxious to stand well with their rural constituents protested against American dollars being wasted in hospitalities and honors to scions of the effete monarchies of Europe.

No such objection can be raised when it comes to the question of the expenses to be incurred in welcoming President Poincare. Although he will be received as President Wilson was in France and everywhere else abroad with full sovereign honors, he comes here as the head of a Government that is quite as democratic as that of this sister republic. Moreover, there will be a universal popularity about the visit of President Poincare that certainly did not exist in the case of Prince Henry's visit.

President Poincare, it may be assumed, will come to America on board one of the bigger French liners, converted for the occasion into a Government yacht, and escorted by several French battleships. These will be met off the Capes by an American squadron which will escort him to Newport News. There he will be met by the Secretary of State, by members of the Cabinet and by the ranking officers of the army and navy, who will escort him up the Potomac on the Mayflower to Washington, where he will be welcomed on landing by the President and Mrs. Wilson.

In accordance with the precedent set by President Wilson in Paris President Poincare will address both houses of Congress. In view of the fact that he was the leader of the French bar the Supreme Court may be depended upon to devise means of paying him signal honor. That he will visit Chicago, St. Louis, Boston and Philadelphia, the cradle of American liberty, goes without saying, and it is taken for granted that he will spend two or three days in New York before embarking here on his return to France.

But throughout his stay he will be the guest of the entire nation.